

# **FALLACY**

**a false, invalid, or misleading  
argument.**

# RED HERRING

Changing the subject to redirect the attention away from the original argument

Examples:

- Political candidate lays out his plan for economic stimulus, and his opponent begins to talk about his tax records and how he has misled the public.
- A student gets into trouble for not meeting the dress code at her school. When her teacher confronts her, she begins talking about how the dress code is a punishment for girls, and how boys are able to wear whatever they want.

# *AD HOMINEM*

an argument that attacks the character of a presenter instead of the argument of the presenter

Examples:

- A politician argues that his opponent cannot possibly be a good choice for women because he has been divorced five times.
- “You can’t trust the Kennedys. They have been photographed partying with Communist Prime Minister Fidel Castro.”

# EITHER/OR (False Dichotomy)

A type of fallacy in which the presenter provides only two options when there could be many

Examples:

- “You are either with us, or you are against us.”
- “You have two choices: Drink water every day and be healthy, or continue to drink sodas and get sick.”
- **Child to parent:** “Either you buy me this new book, or you decide that reading is not important.”

# SLIPPERY SLOPE

an argument that if one event is allowed to happen,  
other negative events are sure to follow

Examples:

- “If we allow the principal to change the date of the homecoming dance, what's next? He's going to want to cancel the dance altogether!”
- “If you allow LGBTQ books in school, it will convert our children to that lifestyle”
- “Don't let your cousin borrow \$10. He'll start borrowing money every day.”

# PLAIN FOLKS

attempting to establish a connection based on being a “regular person” just like you or me.

Example:

- “My fellow Americans, I am just like you. Sure, I have a private jet and homes in twelve countries, but I put on my pants one leg at a time, just like you common people. Let’s do our part. This increase in taxes for lower- and middle-income households will help us in our war effort.”

# TAUTOLOGIES

an argument that claims to have proved something simply by defining it as true.

Examples:

- I went to see him personally.
- In my opinion, I think he's wrong.
- I know it's true because I heard it with my own ears.

# CHERRY-PICKING

a fallacy in which the argument only presents the kind of evidence that that will support its point

## Examples:

- My political candidate gives 10 percent of her income to the needy, goes to church every Sunday, and volunteers one day a week at a homeless shelter. She's such an honest woman.

**Explanation:** The information that was left out of the example is that this same candidate gives 10 percent of her income to needy prostitutes in exchange for services, goes to a bar every Sunday after church (and sometimes before), and only works at the homeless shelter to get clients for her drug-dealing business.

# APPEAL TO FALSE AUTHORITY

a fallacy in which the presenter relies on the statements of an alleged authority figure (or an authority on a different subject).

Examples:

- “My 6th-grade teacher once told me that girls who learn how to dance will go crazy for boys who learn how to dance. So, if you want to make the ladies go crazy for you, learn to dance.”
- “My sister-in-law—who is a highly paid chef—said that this school is not somewhere that I would want to send my children.”

# APPEAL TO IGNORANCE (DENOUNCING)

a fallacy assumed to be valid because  
there is no evidence against it

Examples:

- Javier: Will you go out with me tonight?  
Jane: Why should I?  
Javier: Why shouldn't you?
- “Since you haven't been able to prove your innocence,  
I must assume you're guilty.”

# APPEAL TO TRADITION

a fallacy in which something traditional is assumed to be valid simply because “It’s always been done that way.”

Examples:

- “My father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all doctors. I should be one too.”
- “Gay marriage is wrong because marriage has always been between a man and a woman.”

# BANDWAGON

a fallacy in which one accepts or rejects an argument because almost everyone else accepts it or rejects it. (Peer pressure)

Examples:

- “Everyone has their own YouTube channel these days, so you should too.”
- “John buys a ring camera for his front door because all his neighbors have one. They are much safer now”
- Cathy is opposed to social media because she would rather have a face-to-face conversation. However, more and more of Cathy’s friends have joined social media sites, so Cathy feels she needs to create an account as well.

# CIRCULAR REASONING

**A type of fallacy in which the presenter attempts to use the point of the argument as evidence for the argument**

Examples:

- “You must obey the law because breaking the law is illegal.”
- Student: Why didn't I receive full credit on my essay?

Teacher: Because your paper did not meet the requirements for full credit.

# APPEAL TO HYPOCRISY

a fallacy in which the presenter discredits the validity of someone's argument by pointing out their failure to act in accordance with its conclusion

Examples:

- **Person A:** People who smoke marijuana are weak and can't handle real life.  
**Person B:** Says the guy with a martini in his hand!
- A political candidate's speech about the dangers of drug use is attacked because there is record of him using drugs while in college.

# CONFIRMATION BIAS

**Seeking out information which confirms a belief while ignoring information that contradicts it.**

Example:

- Voters will ignore information from news broadcasters when it contradicts their existing views.

# NON-SEQUITUR

a conclusion or statement that does not logically follow from the previous argument or statement.

Examples:

- Since you are such a good person, therefore, I'm a good person.
- If I am an adult, then I'm intelligent. I'm not an adult; therefore, I'm not intelligent
- Mary makes the best cakes. She should run for mayor.

# MORAL EQUIVALENCE

equivalence is drawn between two subjects based on flawed or false reasoning.

Examples:

- It's like comparing apples and oranges.
- Guns kill people but so do automobiles. Should we ban automobiles?
- Knives and dynamite can both be used as weapons, so they're basically the same thing. If people can buy knives at the store, they should also be able to buy dynamite.

# DISMISSIVE FALLACY

dismissing an argument simply  
because it *sounds* absurd

Examples:

- **Alex:** thousand of scientists just signed a document urging countries to consider the risks of climate change.

**Bob:** who cares. It's a ridiculous idea anyway.

**Alex:** what? How so?

**Bob:** I don't know. It just sounds made up. I don't know about you, but I don't believe it.

- “You just need to hear a little about the theory of evolution to know that it's ridiculous. I mean, they basically think that we're all just apes.”

# STACKING THE DECK

cheating or fixing something so a desired outcome is achieved (opposing evidence is ignored).

Examples:

- (literally) slipping a few extra aces into the deck that you deal yourself.
- showing only the positive aspects of a product while ignoring its potential drawbacks.

# FALLACY OF COMPOSITION

the error of assuming that what is true for one member of a group is true for the group as a whole

Examples:

- If a runner runs faster, he can win the race. Therefore, if all the runners run faster, they can all win the race.
- Hydrogen is not wet, and Oxygen is not wet; therefore, water (H<sub>2</sub>O) is not wet.
- If all the players on the team are the best in their positions, then this must be the best team.

# STRAW MAN

arguing against a false or distorted view of someone's actual argument

Examples:

- Wife: I'd rather have a dog than a cat.

Husband: Why do you hate cats?

- Teacher A: I think we should give out better study guides to students.

Teacher B: That's a bad idea because we shouldn't give out easy A's to everyone.

- Politician 1: We should put more money into health and education.

Politician 2: So you hate your country so much that you want to leave it defenceless by cutting military spending.

# SUNK COSTS

the tendency to follow through on an endeavor in which we have invested time and money even if the costs outweigh the benefits.

Examples:

- Individuals sometimes order too much food and then overeat just to “get their money’s worth.”
- A person pays \$100 for a concert ticket a month in advance, then on the day of the concert gets sick and drives for hours through a blizzard to get there anyway.

# Investigate your sources with the *CRAAP TEST*

## - Is it **CURRENT**?

How old is this? Do the links still work? When was the last time it was updated?

## - Is it **RELEVANT**?

Is this scholarly or popular? Is the language too technical or too simple? Can I find better information somewhere else?

## - Is it **AUTHORITATIVE**?

Is there an author? are they affiliated with a university or organization? What is the URL (.com, .edu, .gov)?

## - Is it **ACCURATE**?

Are the original sources cited? Can I verify this information? Has this been independently reviewed? are there grammar errors or typos?

## - What is its **PURPOSE**?

What was the author's purpose for writing this? Is advertising mixed in with the content? Does the tone seem judgemental or overly positive? Are possible biases clearly stated?

# FALLACY OF ORIGINS

fallacy of irrelevance based on someone's or something's history, origin, or source rather than its current meaning or context

Examples:

- I can't believe anything my doctor says since he's so overweight himself.
- You shouldn't believe anything the media says. It's all fake news.

# **CORRELATION vs. CAUSATION (False Cause)**

two events that occur together are claimed to have a cause-and-effect relationship

Examples:

- Sleeping with one's shoes on is correlated to waking up with a headache.
- Every time I wash my car it rains.
- If you break a mirror, you'll have 7 years of bad luck.

# TESTIMONIAL

inserting an endorsement (of something) by someone who is popular & well respected, but who also lacks expertise on the subject.

Examples:

- “I’m not a doctor, but I play one on TV.”
- As an English teacher, I must say that Coke is better than Pepsi.

# FALSE ANALOGY

assuming that because two things are alike in one or more respects, they are necessarily alike in some other respect.

Examples:

- Doctors look up difficult cases in medical books, so students should be able to use their textbook during exams.
- Cars cause more deaths than firearms do. If we ban firearms, we should ban cars too.